

fame. The discussion was short, but very fairly general—some of the following were generally held to be essential qualities:—

1. Strong will.
2. Devotion to an idea.
3. Ambition.
4. To be a "Dreamer of Dreams."
5. To be silent under disadvantages.
6. To have the magnanimity to forgive his friends.

The meeting agreed that the test of greatness was not personal fame, but what a man's life effected for the betterment of his fellow creatures.

### SHELLEY'S "ALASTOR."

THIS poem, the first of Shelley's maturer writings, is, I think, one of his most characteristic works: it shows very clearly both the qualities and defects of his genius.

The reader, or still more, the hearer of this poem is, first of all, dazzled by the rapid succession of vividly portrayed scenes; he seems to share the poet's wonderfully keen mental vision, to be borne on the wings of his genius till, standing beside the seer on the lofty peak of Imagination, the reader also gazes through the crystal air, on long vistas opened up through a newly-revealed world of magic beauty.

Secondly, attention is drawn by the music of the poet's language and the force and brilliance of word-painting—whether in detailed landscape sketches, or in exquisitely delicate phrases—"Apples of gold in pictures of silver"—which are not merely descriptive, but actually powerful to call up images before the mind. I will quote a few of the lines that have thus appealed to me:—

- "Sunset and its gorgeous ministers."
- "Solemn midnight's tingling silentness."
- "When night makes a weird sound of its own stillness."

(Does not this recall the phrase of a modern writer—

- "The air was full of all the night-noises that taken together make one big silence"?)
- "Winter, robing with pure snow and crown Of starry ice the grey grass and bare boughs."
- "Silence, too enamoured of that voice, Locks its mute music in her rugged cell."
- "Solemn vision and bright *silver* dream."

(How forcibly that one word "silver," contrasted unconsciously with a possible "golden," characterises the poet's boyish dreams as spiritual—not sensuous!)

- "Among the ruined temples there, Stupendous columns and wild images Of more than men, where marble demons watch The Zodiac's brazen mystery, and dead men Hang their mute thoughts on the mute walls around."
- "The cold white light of morning; the moon Low in the west; the clear and garish hills, The distinct valley."

———"A shadowy lure  
With doubtful smile mocking its own strange charms"—

(a phrase that always recalls to my mind the mysteriously fascinating Gioconda of the Louvre).

- "The waves arose. Higher and higher still Their fierce necks writhed beneath the tempest's scourge Like serpents struggling in a vulture's grasp."
- "Black gulfs and yawning caves Whose windings gave ten thousand various tongues To the loud stream."
- "The dark earth and the bending vault of stars."

Of longer passages, the descriptions of the Vision, of the poet's death, of the rivulet in which he sees an image of his life, and of nightfall ("Evening came on," etc.), are very fine; while, I should think, Shelley's magnificent painting of the forest at noon can never be surpassed—not a single phrase of it but might be quoted as a gem. Yet I once heard a lover of Nature and admirer of Wordsworth regret that the poet's "fancifulness" led him to describe oaks, beeches, and tropical parasites in the same locality!

The weak points of the poem, however, are not hard to find. We feel here, as in many others of Shelley's writings, a lack of sympathy with the joys and sorrows, hopes and fears of common human life. The theme is carried to a high and mystic plane, abstractions are dealt with throughout, and appeal is made almost exclusively to the imagination.

The story is clearly told, has been too clearly visualized for vagueness, but the loose thought which is rather characteristic of our author is perceptible in several passages of which I will quote a typical example:—

—“She  
Folded his frame in her dissolving arms.  
Now blackness veiled his dizzy eyes, and night  
Involved and swallowed up the vision; sleep  
Like a dark flood suspended in its course  
Rolled back its impulse on his vacant brain.  
Roused by the shock, he started from his trance.”—

The reader might not unnaturally ask—What shock? Could the shock of falling asleep awaken him? Or could it possibly be the shock consequent on the dissolution of her arms, alluded to so briefly in the antepenultimate sentence?

The poem begins with a twofold invocation of the “beloved brotherhood: earth, ocean, air,” and of Nature, “Mother of this unfathomable world,” the “great Parent” to whom the poet has dedicated all his powers of intellect and of love, and whose secrets it is the dream of his life to penetrate,—a dream so far realized that he can patiently and trustfully await further enlightenment at the pleasure of her who is the sole source of his inspiration. Then follows the story: the life of a Poet who lived and died in solitude. In his youth his soul was fed by dreams and visions, by meditation upon all that is great, good, and lovely, in the history and fable of the past, and by the illuminating speculations of divine philosophy; while his chief joys were furnished by the wonders and beauties of Nature. But his heart was never warmed at the sacred fire of family affection; the cold hearth of his alienated home chilled the fount of love within him, so that the pure glow which his beauty and his genius kindled in many a maiden awoke no responsive thrill in his ice-sealed heart—he spurned the choicest gifts of human love and passed on all unconscious of his loss, his whole being deeply absorbed in great thoughts and subtle speculations. At length, however, came the inevitable reaction from this strained, unnatural state of affairs. A craving for sympathy, that longing to receive, and impulse to give love, which is innate in every human heart awakens, like a hungry giant, within him. He is devoured by a fiery passion for one whom he sees in a vision of the night, for one whom he dreams able

to fulfil the desires of each part of his being: of sense, of long-starved heart, and, no less, of high-aspiring soul. In his dream he tastes supreme bliss—the completion of his widest possibilities—but the cup is dashed from his lips at the very moment when the precious nectar seems about to satisfy his thirst for ever. He awakes. She—this perfect being—vanishes. Henceforth his life is one insatiable hunger and thirst, one long aching search for her presence. Thus she, Alastor, the unforgetting, not-to-be-forgotten, avenges the loss of those to whom throughout his life the poet has denied the love to which they had lawful right to claim from him by right of a common humanity, and coins his heart's capital to pay at once the long-accumulated debt. He wanders far and wide, over land and sea, ever seeking her whose image fills all his thoughts. The common facts of natural life, which formerly had sufficed to give the poet the deepest joy that he could even fancy, now fail to satisfy him, and awaken strange vibrating echoes and weird harmonies within his soul.

The fact that in the world around him desire generally finds fulfilment seems a bitter satire on his own devouring passion, on his newly-awakened powers of conceiving and desiring love, for he knows that his desire is unattainable, and can but work his ruin. At last, spent by the fruitless force of his longing, he dies. His life ebbs gently, peacefully away as the crescent moon sinks behind an eclipsing rock.

The poem concludes with a despairing lament over his death, over the eternal extinction of a bright young spirit: for in this awful, hopeless aspect is Death here viewed.

Now, we ask, what is the meaning of this Allegory? The preface gives its general interpretation:—

“The poet's self-centred seclusion was avenged by the furies of an irresistible passion pursuing him to speedy ruin.” The theme is, in fact, the same which Tennyson has since treated—viz., the truth that no man can live unto himself; that life is the establishment of relation,—giving and taking; that as man's nature is many sided, so he can live only by virtue of manifold relationships, established no less with his fellow-men (social relations founded on the affections) than with God and Nature (spiritual and physical relations).

Ignorance or neglect of this law brings inevitable punishment—a fact to which Educators, both parents and teachers, are happily awakening now-a-days. The penalty may be

either of two alternatives. (1) The man's whole self may be stunted or distorted—for the whole body suffers with each of the members—by a wider application of which principle it follows that the whole community suffers loss, since all through his life such a man will consciously or unconsciously miss much possible happiness and usefulness and cause much unnecessary evil and pain to himself and others. (2) Or, his whole life may be ruined through the sudden revolt of the crushed, starved members—as the whole French nation suffered when the oppressed, degraded people seized that which they might justly claim.

Another interpretation, a personal reading, is, I think, more than possible. Shelley was a professed Atheist, driven thereto by his native candour and hatred of empty shows, as well as by the philosophical spirit which he had inherited from the preceding generation—the age of the Encyclopædia, of the first apparent triumph of science over revelation, when Knowledge ousting Superstition seemed to banish Faith. But, since man needs must worship, though it be but the works of his own hand, Shelley proceeded to deify Nature, whom he regarded—not as his great contemporary viewed her, as the garment of the Almighty or as a visible thought of the Creator—but as an unfathomable abstraction, whose aspects he personified that he might adore her in the spirit of the Pantheists. Yet this worship could not satisfy his soul, but he must ever yearn and hunger for that which alone can fulfil man's infinite aspirations and exhaust his whole capacity of knowing, loving, and believing—infinitely wise and just and powerful Love, a personal God, in fellowship with Whom man's personality may find completion. Stung by this human longing, the crowning glory of man's nature, the poet uttered this plaint, in which, though veiled by vivid imagery and voiced in subtle harmonies, we yet can hear the cry of the starving soul that thirsteth for God like as a hart panteth for the water brooks.

K. R. H.

## THE JUDGMENT OF PARIS.

### PERSONS.

JUNO .. . A MAJESTIC MATRON.

ATHENE .. SCHOLARLY.

VENUS .. GEMENINE.

AND

PARIS .. . THE MAN OF THE PARTY.

### SCENE.

*A room looking down upon Mount Tola from the heights of Olympus. Juno at a loom, Athené reading, Venus looking out of window. All looking sulky.*

*Juno.* Considering, sisters, I am Heaven's Queen,  
Your manners are the worst I've ever seen!  
Here's Venus hints that I am but a fright,  
And you, Athené, say I'm seldom right.

*Athené.* The ways of wisdom, m'am, you'll never know,  
You're like your peacock—small head, train for show!

*Venus.* Dear Juno, she thinks nothing but of books,  
And I can't help considering people's looks.

*Juno.* I hate Athené—she's a little prig.  
For what *you* say I never care a fig.  
I am the greatest, therefore am the best,  
And with that surely we can let it rest.

*Venus.* The best! You! Why, my blessed Dame,  
You're not the greatest if it comes to fame.  
I'm better known than you, I really trust,  
For love and beauty must rank first, they must!

*Athené.* You, my dear friends, have had no wondrous town  
Named after you to add to your renown.  
Though Beauty reigns in youth and for a season,  
The gift which lasts is surely my pure reason!